

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

This chapter will outline procedures for interviewing the subjects of a report and other persons who may have relevant information.

I. OBJECTIVES OF THE INTERVIEW

The purpose of interviewing is to establish contact with the subjects of the report and other persons who may have relevant information. The worker should use the interviews to secure information to assess the need for protective services and the priority status of that need. The worker should use investigative interviews to secure information relevant to determining whether there is credible verbal evidence or physical evidence to determine a reason to suspect conclusion or whether there are indicators to determine an unsubstantiated preventive services indicated conclusion or if neither is present, and unsubstantiated conclusion.

II. PREPARING FOR INTERVIEW

To best prepare for a child abuse and neglect response the worker should consider and resolve any personal doubts about his authority. It is critical for the worker to evaluate his own reactions to the allegations contained in each report. Despite training and expertise, a worker is not necessarily immune from negative feelings about allegations. The worker needs to recognize and resolve these feelings in the effort to maintain objectivity.

The worker must be prepared to acknowledge his/her own feelings realizing that personal biases are inappropriate in the professional setting. Biases only inhibit an objective assessment of the facts.

Some allegations of abuse and neglect will not be settled conclusively. Despite rigorous investigative efforts, the available evidence will not prove or disprove certain allegations. Workers will then have to enter an unsubstantiated conclusion. A status of reason to suspect cannot be determined if there is no physical or credible verbal evidence to support the status.

The rule of thumb for the investigation is that obtaining too much information is preferred to obtaining too little. Remembering that each piece of information is the key to additional information that reinforces the importance of the fact-finding process and the interviewing mode.

<p>NOTE: If the case involves a current client, review case records, talk to protective service worker, but do not make preconceived decisions. Be objective.</p>
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III. OPENING THE INTERVIEW

The manner in which the worker begins the initial interview will set the tone and pace for the investigation/assessment. Consequently, it is important that the worker utilize techniques which will facilitate entry into the home.

The worker should introduce her/himself and show an ID card to the caretaker(s). He/She should then clearly explain the purpose of the visit. The worker should anticipate that the individual will be, at the minimum, surprised at the worker's presence. If the individual is hostile and threatening, the worker has the option of leaving the home. A situation of this sort is a judgement call, but under no circumstances should a worker feel obligated to pursue an interview with a person who constitutes a danger to his/her safety. On the other hand, many people may simply need to express their anger and frustration and may do so without actually posing an immediate threat. Before beginning a lengthy conversation, the worker should ask permission to go into the home if the caretaker has not already extended this invitation. Once inside, the worker should try to go to a comfortable private area to sit down and talk.

The worker should then state the reason for the investigation/assessment, making reference to the receipt of a hotline report. He/She should provide the alleged perpetrator and subjects of the report a written description of the investigation process (CS-24) and assessment process (CS-24A). Leading into the interview by discussing the agency's concern for the child's safety and well-being, in general terms rather than in specific terms, will encourage the caretaker's discussion of problems and will not limit the conversation by focusing exclusively on the specific allegations in the report. The worker should assume a non-accusatory manner and emphasize that the report has not been accepted as true and that determining its validity is the purpose of the fact-finding process. In addition, the worker should enlist the caretaker's assistance in identifying problems and in determining whether the child has been harmed or is at risk of future harm. The worker should consider asking the caretaker about the child in general (i.e., his/her routine, behavior, development) to ease into a more specific decision of the caretaker-child interactions and the caretaker's perception of the child's condition.

The worker should also tell the caretaker that he/she will need to interview the child, alleged perpetrator (if other than the caretaker) and perhaps others who can lead to the final case determination. The more the parent understands about the investigation/assessment process and the worker's role, the more likely he/she is to cooperate.

Things you may want to tell the caretaker, depending on your particular case situation, include:

- The agency's responsibility to secure information from other persons and facilities in order to complete a thorough investigation/assessment;
- The agency's responsibility to intervene, when necessary, initiate court petitions, and provide services;

- The agency's intent to work confidentially with them, except when it becomes necessary to inform and/or collaborate with the court systems, law enforcement officials or other relevant agencies (i.e., hospital);
- The possibility of arrest and criminal prosecution of the perpetrator;
- The fact that information concerning the report has been entered into the agency's files and the subjects have a right to access some information in the report (excluding reporter's name);
- The caretaker's rights and responsibilities; and
- The additional action to be taken by the worker, including information that will be sought. At times a written consent/release of information should be obtained to contact certain collaterals. i.e., hospitals, counselors. Statute allows investigator to obtain such information, but it may be easier with consent.

IV. CONDUCTING THE INTERVIEW

ESTABLISHING RAPPORT

Workers use a variety of methods to establish rapport. These methods vary significantly given the persons involved and the situation in which interviews are taking place. Workers exercise their professional judgment when formulating an approach to developing rapport and take into consideration several personal factors, including:

- The emotional and physical health of the individual;
- The apparent educational level of the individual;
- The individual's ability to understand English or the worker's fluency in the interviewee's language;
- The maturity and sophistication of the individual; and,
- The individual's level of hostility.

Interviews are usually conducted in person, although telephone contacts with collateral sources are used when time and other constraints make face-to-face contact impossible. Interviews with the caretaker and child must always take place in person, although subsequent telephone contacts may be used to obtain clarifying information or to discuss a particular aspect of the agency's intervention.

The nature of the investigation and intervention in family life can create an adversary relationship between the worker and the family. The worker must be mindful that attempts to discuss problems and concerns with the family will be difficult and will be met with some resistance. Communication can only be accomplished if the worker is willing and able to discuss the nature and potential outcomes of the agency's involvement. Persons who feel that they are being deceived or manipulated will be hesitant to talk openly about child rearing difficulties that may have resulted in abuse and neglect. The worker should never lie to or deceive the interviewee or minimize the importance of the investigation. Attempts to soften the impact of the agency's involvement, through hidden agendas or by misrepresenting the process or outcome of child protective interventions to assure the child's safety, will backfire. Rather, the worker should emphasize that the agency's primary objectives are to assure the child's safety, to determine the validity of the report, and to limit its intervention in family life. Expressing the agency's child protective role and responsibility in non-threatening, non-accusatory, matter-of-fact manner will convey concern for the child's safety and the non-compromising nature of the investigation.

In summary, rapport is the positive feeling the worker seeks to establish with a client. To reach this goal remember these tips:

- Show empathy;
- Express concern;
- Be non-punitive;
- Be honest; and
- Focus on the here and now.

MAINTAINING CONTROL

The potentially adversarial nature of child protective services investigations may create a difficult environment for conducting interviews. Interviewees may express anger, hostility, denial or resistance. They may do so by becoming verbally abusive, sullen, manipulative, overly compliant, and/or physically aggressive.

In order to maintain control during interviewing, the worker should utilize a variety of techniques, including:

STRUCTURING INTERVIEWS: To control the interview, workers should keep interviewees on the subject, prevent them from going into excessive or extraneous detail, and maintain a calm, emphatic and firm demeanor which will help prevent escalating emotions. The worker should not appear shocked or surprised at information given or feelings expressed during investigations.

MAINTAINING OBJECTIVITY: The worker should not interpret an interviewee's negative remarks as a personal attack. If the remarks are taken personally, the worker may become defensive, discourteous, argumentative, or conciliatory and is likely to disrupt the course of the interview. A worker's retreat from a stated position, apology for the investigation, or inappropriate agreement with the interviewee's statements to pacify him or her may weaken the worker's authority as well as complicate and impede the interview.

BEING ASSERTIVE: Workers should be assertive by communicating confidence in their own role and their professional judgment. They should demonstrate acceptance of the responsibilities invested in them by state law and state and agency policies and procedures. Workers should be comfortable with their knowledge and expertise as investigators. They should not express fear, embarrassment or discomfort with their role as agency representatives. Nonetheless, they should convey the authority of the agency without appearing authoritarian. Remaining calm, composed, and attentive rather than excited, aloof, insensitive, or belligerent is important.

ANTICIPATING RESPONSES AND QUESTIONS: The worker should anticipate that the interviewee will want to know the identity of the reporter and may become hostile or antagonistic in an effort to obtain this information. The worker should inform the interviewee that the reporter's identity is confidential and cannot be shared, just as information secured in the investigation will also remain confidential. The worker should quickly redirect the interview, making it clear that the investigation must continue. In some instances it is inevitable that the interviewee will randomly name the reporter in a guessing game to determine the reporter's identity. The worker should anticipate that this will happen and be prepared, each time, to matter-of-factly redirect the interview back to the incident. Because the law protects the confidentiality of the reporter, refusing to confirm or deny the interviewee's guess is important.

REDIRECTING: Anger and fear are typical reactions to being interviewed. To prevent escalating emotions from impeding the investigation, the worker may wish to redirect the interview to a "safe" topic. After the interviewee has regained his/her composure, the worker gently and sympathetically leads the interviewee back and redirect him/her through leading questions to a discussion of the immediate situation.

DISCONTINUING INTERVIEWS TEMPORARILY: A final strategy that should be considered when the interviewee's anger or hostility is hampering the investigation is to stop the interview temporarily and resume it at a later time. Before the worker uses this technique the following should be considered:

- The effect the delay may have on the child's safety;
- The possibility that the interviewee might try to cover up the truth;

- The likelihood that the family might flee with the child; and
- The time frames for completing the investigation.

The worker should consider interviewing the child or other family and household members when it appears necessary to temporarily discontinue an interview with the caretaker. Unless physically threatened, the worker should see the child prior to leaving the home. Pausing to do so gives the worker an opportunity to carry out mandated responsibilities while providing the caretaker with time to calm down and regain composure.

If the worker decides to discontinue the interview temporarily, he/she should make another appointment immediately to resume the interview. Depending on worker's assessment of the situation, he/she may wish to return to the home later alone, return to the residence with the police, or request the interviewee to come to the worker's office.

RESPONDING TO OVERLY COMPLIANT INTERVIEWEES: Workers may encounter interviewees who are unable to express themselves directly and resort to behaving in what superficially appears to be a very socially acceptable manner. The worker who is not prepared to deal with the overly compliant, accepting or helpful individual may relinquish control of the interview.

The worker should not be falsely assured by overly compliant, cooperative and accommodating behavior or statements. These may be a smoke screen to diffuse the agency's concern and to manipulate the worker. In certain situations the worker should be suspicious when, despite the adversarial nature of the investigation, a caretaker graciously and warmly receives the worker in the home, taking care to be friendly and complimentary during the interview. This behavior may be coupled with attempts to engage in social conversation. While acknowledging that this behavior and attitude are facilitating the interview, the worker should realize that determining the validity of the report and assessing the child's need for protective services are the main purposes of the investigation.

HANDLING PHYSICAL AND VERBAL THREATS: On occasion, a worker may encounter individuals who threaten the worker's physical safety. No threat should ever be ignored, although the context and expression of the threat should influence the worker's response. Observations about behavior, communication and physical appearance are also critical to gauging the likelihood that the individual will carry out a threat of physically attacking the worker. These cues include:

- An individual experiencing a high degree of emotional arousal (i.e., feeling rage or threatened) may exhibit increased body movement, accelerated speech, or a change in the volume and tone of voice;

- An individual fearing attack or invasion of personal territory may physically distance himself or herself from the worker in an effort to defend against the perceived threat;
- An individual's facial expression (tensed muscles, dilated pupils, fixed stare, clenched teeth, reddened face) may signal potential uncontrolled anger;
- Communications which become increasingly abbreviated during the course of the interview may signal the individual's loss of control. Noteworthy is a change from narrative explanations and answers to abrupt, abbreviated speech (i.e., yes, no, so what, etc.).

At all times, remaining calm, composed, and in control is important. Remembering that aggressive or hostile behavior may represent the individual's fear and self defense mechanisms is important. Reassuring the individual of concern for the child's safety while restating the worker's roles and responsibility in a non-threatening way may be comforting.

Individuals who remain enraged and diffused by discussions with the worker or who seem unaware that their behavior is threatening should be taken seriously. Under some circumstances telling the individual that police will be summoned is not advised if it could prompt the individual to attack the worker. Being prepared to assess the potential danger of a situation is critical. The worker should never ignore any cue that the worker's physical safety is in danger, nor should the worker ever hesitate to obtain assistance of law enforcement or juvenile court personnel when appropriate, to ensure the child's safety.

ASSESSING THE INTERVIEWEE'S CONDITION: An important factor influencing the process and outcome of any interview is the condition of the person being interviewed including age, level of intellectual functioning, personality, emotional state, and influence of alcohol or other chemical intoxicants.

As a general rule, do not attempt to conduct interviews with chemically intoxicated individuals. In all but emergency situations, their interviews should be postponed. If a caretaker's functioning is so hampered by his or her condition that it endangers the child's safety, emergency intervention may be necessary. In all other situations, the individual should be informed that the worker will return in a few hours to resume the interview. If discussion with the intoxicated person can't be postponed, the worker may find that patience is necessary. Keep questions simple and focused on the situation at hand. Consider the need for leaving a note to remind the individual of an expected return visit. Before leaving, the worker should see the child who is the subject of the report. If a caretaker won't permit access to the child, the worker should return with law

enforcement/juvenile court personnel immediately, if necessary. Additionally, the worker should find out what arrangements have been made for the child's care and supervision.

USING INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION TECHNIQUES: Effectively using interpersonal communication techniques is critical to successful interviewing. The following techniques will increase the worker's skills and enhance investigatory abilities:

- Use clear and concise wording and phrasing in all questions and explanations;
- Appear energetic, alert, and attentive rather than sleepy, lethargic, and disinterested;
- Establish direct eye contact with interviewees, however, staring or glaring can be as distracting as failing to look directly at the individual;
- Be aware of the impact of physical proximity on an interview. The greater the physical distance between the worker and the interviewee, the more difficult it may be for the worker to communicate a helping attitude. Conversely, sitting or standing too close to the interviewee may be so distracting and discomforting that it impedes the interview;
- Consider the effect of body posture on the interview process. The worker should face the interviewee with the worker's body inclined forward;
- Be attuned to the effective use of nonverbal gestures. A spontaneous use of nonverbal gestures (i.e., head nods, hand movements) can enhance communication. However, overuse can be distracting.
- In order to encourage individuals to discuss problems and concerns openly and candidly, the worker may utilize the following techniques:
 - Use unstructured invitation-to-talk statements that enable or encourage the interviewee to begin talking about personal concerns. For example, "Can you tell me how Cindy got hurt?" "Can you tell me what happened to Cindy";
 - Use minimal verbal responses (i.e., yes, no, um-hum, sure) to reinforce the interviewee's effort to talk about issues and concerns, while reflecting the worker's attentiveness and interest;

- Use responses or questions that require more than the minimal yes or no closed-ended responses. Probing questions are generally prefaced by "what," "where," "when," or "how." For example, rather than asking "Did you beat Cindy and make those marks?" The worker would ask "How do you discipline Cindy?"
- Use restatements to let the interviewee know you are listening attentively and you understand what was said. Restatements may include all or a selected portion of an individual's remarks. In addition, restatements provide the interviewee an opportunity to correct the worker's perception of what was said but misunderstood. The worker may also ask the interviewee to restate all or part of an answer for clarification;
- Periodically summarize the content and central feelings expressed by the interviewee to demonstrate your attentiveness and interest;
- Repeat statements when it is not evident that the interviewee has heard or understood the first time. Repetition should also be used when it is important to emphasize certain points.

OBSERVATION TECHNIQUES: Worker's observations of a variety of conditions and situations during child protective services investigation will contribute to a reason to suspect, unsubstantiated, or unsubstantiated-preventive services indicated conclusion. In order to be prepared to assess the abuse or neglect or risk of abuse or neglect to the child and the child's need for protective services, workers should make observations about:

- Indicators of abuse and neglect;
- Family interactions and functioning;
- The caretaker's attitude toward the child and the parenting experience;
- The developmental milestones of the child;
- The physical condition of the surrounding neighborhood;
- The physical condition in the home; and
- The influence of cultural differences.

Because observations may be clouded by subjective interpretations, workers should document their observations with specific data.

Nonverbal communication occurs during regular day to day interactions. While a variety of these communications may be observed, the worker should strive to interpret them accurately. For example, the worker may observe that the child avoids all physical contact with and remains at a noticeable distance from the caretaker at all times. While this behavior may suggest that the child is afraid of the caretaker, other interpretations are plausible. In fact, the family may disapprove of all physical displays of affection in public, prompting the child to behave as described. The variety of individual and cultural differences dictates that interpretations of observed behavior be tested and that supporting evidence be gathered before reaching a conclusion that abuse or neglect has or is occurring or the child needs protective services. Discussing observations with the family may give the best insight.

INTERVIEWING THE REPORTER: The reporter is one of the most important sources of information about the allegations of abuse and neglect. In fact, the reporter may be the only source, other than the child and caretaker, who provides information about the abuse or neglect of the child. Consequently, gathering complete information from the reporter is a critical part of a comprehensive investigation. Remembering that each piece of information collected during the investigation is key to obtaining additional facts should guide the worker's interviews with all persons, including the reporter.

Upon receipt and review of the report, the worker should determine what additional information and detail should be secured from the reporter. The worker should confirm the information on the report form by contacting the reporter and gathering additional information before contacting the child and caretaker.

The information about what has happened to the child is of particular importance. The worker should encourage the reporter to relate the history of events which preceded the notification of the county agency and to discuss how he or she became aware of the situation and circumstances.

Although the relationship of the reporter to the child and family will often suggest how the information was obtained (i.e., the maternal grandmother who resides with family), the worker should pursue this line of questioning to elicit all relevant facts and details. Reporters are abuse/neglect victims and the worker should express appreciation for their contacting the Division.

Interviewing the school liaison. If the child is enrolled in school, the worker should initiate contact with the school district liaison to gain and share information throughout the investigation/assessment process. The school Liaison may be considered a member of a multi-disciplinary treatment team, depending on their relationship with the child and/or family. The amount of detail given will reflect the school liaison's prior involvement.

INTERVIEW PARENT/PERPETRATOR: Investigative interviews with adults provide workers with opportunities to secure facts relevant to determining whether a child has been abused or neglected or is at risk of future abuse or neglect and to determine if the child is in need of protective services. Techniques utilized by workers as they interview adults will vary with the educational level, maturity, emotional state, relationship of the adult to the child, and condition of the interviewee. The worker should consider a variety of factors and techniques to complete interviews with adults in an effective, comprehensive, and timely manner, including the following:

LANGUAGE USAGE: The worker should communicate information in a concrete and specific manner, using commonly understood vocabulary. Jargon or abbreviations (i.e., CD) should be avoided. Focusing questions and discussion on the child's health and safety provides structure to the interviews and minimizes the number of distractions which might interfere with the fact-finding process.

Words that imply blame should be avoided in order to defuse the crisis and stress created by the investigation. For example, it is better to say, "The agency is trying to determine whether Cindy has been neglected." The worker should obviously avoid using value-laden language such as, "What a horrible thing to do."

Serial questioning may be used by workers to obtain information about specific factors and issues relevant to the fact-finding process. Serial questioning differs from open-ended questioning in that it is tailored to elicit specific information. Because these questions are less vague and less open to interpretation, answers may be more concrete and behavior-specific. For example, rather than asking a caretaker about the child's discipline which makes the worker vulnerable to questions such as ("What is discipline?"), a series of questions should be asked to elicit information indirectly on the particular topic, for example:

- Does Cindy listen to you when you give her instructions;
- Is Cindy a cooperative child;
- Does Cindy follow instructions;
- How has Cindy been acting lately;
- Is Cindy difficult to manage;

- How do you control Cindy's behavior when she does not do what you want?

In addition to stating questions precisely, the worker should avoid hurrying the tempo of the interview.

FULL EXPRESSION OF IDEAS AND FEELINGS: The worker should encourage interviewees to express their side of a situation in an open-ended fashion. Allowing them to convey the facts and their impressions will help to establish the worker's impartiality and will demonstrate respect for the individual's viewpoint. Workers should be careful that the use of "why" and "how" questions are not interpreted as accusations. They should create an environment in which caretakers can feel free to discuss their own concerns about the care they are providing to their children.

REENACTMENT OF THE INCIDENT: The worker should consider using reenactment of the incident as a technique to gather information about an incident in which the child was physically harmed. Specifically, the caretaker should be asked to demonstrate how the child received a particular injury by showing the worker where and how the accident occurred. The reenactment allows the worker to make specific observations about the scene of injury and simultaneously to discuss the specifics of the caretaker's account of the injury. This technique is particularly helpful when discussing injuries that the caretaker says are accidental. For example, observing the distance between a crib and the floor, the condition of the floor or carpet, and the position and the movement of the child may pinpoint discrepancies which can be explored by additional questioning. When faced with the impracticality or implausibility of the explanation, the individual may be prompted to provide a factual account of the incident.

DISCREPENCIES IN INFORMATION: Discrepancies in the information provided during investigations are inevitable. The worker should assume that this will occur and be prepared to acknowledge the inconsistencies. The interviewee should be confronted with discrepancies and given an opportunity to clarify, restate and possibly negate information provided earlier. Confrontation is most effectively handled in a calm, matter-of-fact, non-threatening manner. For example, "I'm slightly confused by the information you have provided me. You first said that Cindy turned on the hot water faucet when you left the room, but later you mentioned that you mistakenly turned on the hot water faucet while she was reaching for soap." A request for clarification phrased in the manner does not imply the individual is lying.

CANDOR: The worker should avoid the tendency to agree with everything the interviewee says or to offer false reassurance. Statements

such as "Everything will be fine," or, "Don't be so upset, there is nothing to worry about," may create a false and often temporary sense of security for the interviewee. The nature of investigations precludes these guarantees. A candid acknowledgement of the situation and the range of possible outcomes is preferred to broken promises which weaken the worker's and agency's credibility.

BEHAVIORAL MANIFESTATIONS OF FEELINGS: The worker should be aware that a person who is uncomfortable or inexperienced with directly expressing feelings may instead communicate them indirectly through behavior. Feelings of anger, hostility, rejection, or fear may be expressed by refusing to let the worker enter the home, keeping the worker waiting at the door, being preoccupied with a television or radio program, or missing or being late for appointments.

SILENCE: Silence may be a very effective way to stimulate conversation. Many people are uncomfortable with long pauses and are inclined to begin talking to break the silence. The pause may also provide a break from the intensity of the emotion-laden topics being discussed. The worker should be careful not to break the silence in an effort to reduce discomfort.

INTERVIEWING CHILDREN

An interview of the child who is the subject of the report is necessary to make an assessment of the abuse or neglect and the risk of abuse or neglect to the child. In addition, these interviews provide the worker valuable opportunities to gather information, particularly the child's perception and account of the situation and events which precipitated the child's present condition.

Because the child and the perpetrator may be the only witnesses to the abuse or neglect, the child's account is important. However, the worker should not put the child in the position of having to prove the abuse or neglect.

At the time of a Child Abuse/Neglect report, interview the child(ren) using current policy. If a Juvenile Officer or Law Enforcement Official takes temporary custody (using the CS-33) of a child and the child requests a parent, guardian or attorney be present, the interview shall cease until such time a parent, guardian or attorney is available. This only applies when the person asked for by the child is not the alleged perpetrator and that if the interviewer believes that the parent is protecting the alleged perpetrator they can be excluded from the interview. It is important the CD staff document exactly why they believe the parent is trying to protect the alleged perpetrator. Nothing shall prevent the asking of any questions necessary for the care, treatment, or placement of the child

At the time a child is placed into the custody of the Children's Division, interviewing the child(ren) will be allowed using current policy

When at all possible, children should be interviewed alone and away from parents, or other persons responsible for their care, especially the perpetrator.

Young children may be interviewed with a person whom they trust and who will not obstruct the interview, in order to alleviate their fears or apprehensions.

Taking into account a child's level of maturity or understanding, they should be informed realistically about various actions and outcomes likely to result from the child abuse or neglect.

The worker should also be sensitive to the child's feelings and attempt to avoid frightening the child or contributing to the child's sense of guilt or betrayal.

Children should be interviewed in settings in which they feel comfortable and which offer privacy without interruptions.

Techniques used by workers to interview children should vary based on the worker's professional assessment of the child's age, maturity, mental health, primary language and communication skills.

Interviewing the child may upset the balance of a precarious relationship between the caretaker and the child. The interview may prompt the caretaker to become suspicious, fearful, jealous of, or enraged with the child. In some situations, the interview may prompt retaliatory action by the caretaker which may place the child in increased danger or compound emotional stress. Consequently, the worker should be prepared to assess the impact of the interview and the risk of future abuse or neglect to the child.

The interview may cause the child to experience a wide range of emotions including fear, anxiety, and guilt at being asked to talk about family matters. The worker should be prepared to discuss these feelings with the child in an effort to allay fears and concerns.

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS: Interviewing the child and adult caretaker separately is preferred, particularly if the adult caretaker is the perpetrator. In other situations worker should use discretion and judgement.

- If interviews are conducted together, it is unlikely that either the child or caretaker will feel free to speak openly;
- Individual interviews help prevent situations in which the alleged abusive, neglectful, or passive participants feel challenged by the child's statements and accusations. Such a confrontation not only

impedes the fact-finding process, but also may place the child and others involved in danger.

PLAY AS AN INTERVIEW TECHNIQUE: One of the early decisions made by workers should be how to interview the child. Play as an interview technique has a number of advantages.

- It provides workers either an effective method for establishing rapport while obtaining information about the child's experience;
- It provides a mechanism for the worker to capture the child's interest and to interact on a level that the child understands;
- It provides an opportunity to describe the situation while decreasing the guilt, fear, or anxiety of the situation for the child who has been coerced or coaxed into silence;
- It has an added advantage of promoting expressive responses rather than yes or no replies to closed-ended questions;
- Its use in interviewing the young child can also be less threatening to the caretaker because it will be seen less frequently as a means of interrogation. As a result, the caretaker may be more willing to allow the child to be interviewed alone.

Workers need to be aware of the child's developmental stage when they are considering the use of play or have an opportunity to choose from a selection of play materials. Generally, the preschool child will readily be occupied with puppets, dolls, and fantasy play as well as drawing pictures and telling stories. The worker may wish to ask the child to draw a picture of the family and tell the worker about each person. The elementary school aged child may play with dolls and puppets but may show more interest in art supplies and action toys. Early adolescents may be more interested in direct interviews and table games.

The unavailability of dolls, puppets, and drawing supplies should not discourage the worker from the use of play interviewing. In addition to using whatever toys or props are available in the child's home, the worker can use pens and paper brought to the interview.

The young child's imagination makes it feasible to use a medium that is less symbolic, such as clothes pins, pencils, sticks and paperclips. Workers who choose this technique should be prepared to observe the child's actions, nonverbal communication, and the products of play (i.e., drawings) are important components of communication.

When interviewing the child about allegations of sexual abuse, worker may use anatomically correct dolls. The anatomical features of these dolls provide the child with a visual representation of the parts of the body which can be used to demonstrate what took place. The worker should have the child identify body parts on the anatomically correct doll to learn the child's names for various parts, especially the breast, buttock, anus, penis, vagina, and groin. Anatomically correct dolls are a tool, and should not substitute for verbal interviewing or be used in all situations.

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT: The physical environment may affect how relaxed and comfortable the child is during the interview and should be adjusted to meet the needs of the child. Workers should interview the child in an area that will be free of interruption and provide room for the child to move around and engage in play. Workers should arrange to sit close to and facing the child and make every effort to sit on the child's level (i.e., on the floor or on a low chair). The impersonality of sitting across from the child separated by a desk or table, should be avoided.

The worker should be mindful of the child's maturity and communications throughout the interview.

A five year old should be addressed differently than a more mature fifteen year old. The worker's assessment of the child's communication capabilities should determine which techniques are most appropriate. For example, the worker may ease into the interview by discussing the child's toys or pets when interviewing a five year old and may adopt a similar tactic with the adolescent by focusing on hobbies or school interests.

The content and the language of the conversation should be understood by the child. Jargon should be avoided. If the child appears perplexed, the worker should restate or clarify the content of his/her communication. Similarly, if the worker does not understand a word or expression used by the child, the worker should ask the child to clarify it.

If the child appears embarrassed, the worker may revert to a more general exchange until the child appears relaxed. The child should never be criticized for his/her choice of words, language or difficulty in articulating. The child's feelings about talking with the worker and understanding about the investigation should be discussed.

At an appropriate time, the conversation should move from the general to the specific. At this time the worker should determine what preparation the child has had for the interview and how the child feels about recounting the details of past experiences. The worker should ask if the child understands why the worker came to talk to the child. If the child has not been prepared, the worker should

address the issue honestly. The worker should encourage the child to ask questions and be sure to answer him/her.

The worker should ask what the child's fears are, what the child would like to see happen and would like the worker to do. It is important that information provided to the child be accurate. However, over-informing the child about the process and potential outcomes of the investigation may be overwhelming. The worker should use the child's questions as a guide for deciding how much information to share.

Taping or videotaping the interview, or interviewing jointly with police, may minimize the number of times the child has to discuss the abuse or neglect.

Related Subject: Section 2, Chapter 4, Attachment B, Videotaping of CA/N Victims.

The effective use of the following communication techniques can enhance the interviewing process with the child:

- The worker should give the child undivided attention;
- The worker should control personal reactions to the child's statements so they will not distract the child from sharing experiences. The worker should not express judgment such as "Your mother is a bad person because she abused you." Such a statement may be very offensive to the child and prompt the child to defend the integrity of the parent;
- The worker should try to fit comments or questions into the context of the topic being discussed by the child in order to be responsive. Switching topics abruptly or interrupting the child's train of thought interferes with the discussion of the child's concerns;
- The worker should avoid leading the conversation by suggesting responses. For example, the worker should ask, "Tell me what happened," or "Tell me how you got the bruises;"
- The tempo of the interview should be slow.

SELF BLAME: In all circumstances, the worker should accept and respond to the child's expressions of feelings and provide support. Regardless of the abuse or neglect sustained, the child may still have strong positive feelings about the perpetrator and may in fact feel responsible for the abuse or neglect. In order to counteract this self-blame the worker should not reinforce the label of victim for the child. The child should be told the worker is glad about their discussion, that

abuse has happened to others, and that the worker wants to help protect the child from any further abuse. The worker should refrain from speaking unfavorably when discussing the caretaker and other family or household members and should not expect the child to take sides against them.

CLARITY: The worker should make every effort to clarify unclear and confusing information without suggesting answers or pressing the child for superfluous details or for information the child is not ready to discuss. However, the need for clarity should be balanced with the need to allow the child to describe experiences in his or her own way and at his or her own pace. At no time should workers try to frighten or intimidate the reluctant child into revealing information. Because intimidation is often used by the perpetrator, it can cause additional harm to the child and still fail to elicit the desired response.

TIME CONSIDERATIONS: Workers should be aware of the child's conception of time. Children may not recount events according to the time of day or the day of the month or year. The child may be confused or frightened, and not remember specifics. To clarify dates and details of incidents for legal proceedings, children may be able to relate to the significant times in their lives (i.e., seasons, school time, vacations, holidays, birthdays, meal times, bath time, television program slots).

VIDEO/AUDIO RECORDING: Video or audio recording of meetings, interviews, or interrogations conducted by the state of a child in the state's custody are presumed admissible as evidence in proceedings involving the child, regardless of whether the recording was made before or after the child was taken into the state's custody and such recordings were made prior to the adjudication hearing in the case and are inadmissible only upon a showing by clear and convincing evidence that the recording lacks sufficient incicia of reliability.

CHILD'S INPUT INTO DECISION: At some point, the worker should consider asking for the child's opinion about how the situation could be solved. To the degree possible, the child should have input into decisions that will affect the child without being misled to believe that he or she will influence the decision when this is not the case. In many instances, it may be beneficial to tell the child how the decision will be made.

TECHNIQUES FOR INTERVIEWING COLLATERAL SOURCES: To complete a comprehensive investigation it is often necessary for the worker to interview persons outside the home who can provide factual information and additional perspectives about the child, caretaker and family situations. The following persons may be able to provide important statements and supporting documentations regarding the allegations:

- Police personnel;

- School officials and personnel;
- Medical personnel;
- Day care and preschool personnel;
- Regular babysitters;
- Extended family members;
- The child's friends and acquaintances;
- Neighbors; and
- Other agency personnel.

The worker should consider the following, when selecting a collateral source to interview:

- Which collateral sources are concerned about the child, have information concerning the child and the investigation and will respect confidentiality;
- The worker should make every effort to preserve confidentiality when interviewing collateral sources. The worker should be guided by revealing only that which is absolutely necessary to obtain the desired information;
- The worker should seek to obtain the direct observations of collateral sources and should determine when and where the observations were made. Impressions may also be gathered if the collateral sources are able to distinguish and label their impressions as different from the reported facts.

Many collateral sources may be reluctant to share information with the agency regarding the child or caretaker. Current statutes give the agency authority to obtain information; however, a written authorization may be helpful. The worker should inform collateral sources that the information they provide will be recorded in the Division's record, and subjects of the report have the right to view the record.

V. TECHNIQUES FOR CLOSING INTERVIEWS

Certain techniques should be used to help draw interviews to a close. The worker should summarize the major issues and feelings and ask the interviewees if there are

any other concerns they would like to discuss. Interviewees should have an opportunity to clarify any unclear or confusing information and should be left with an understanding of the purpose of the interview. Asking interviewees to summarize what has gone on in the interview is one way to gauge their understanding. Similarly, the worker should clarify any confusing or ambiguous statements.

The worker can begin to wind down the interview before terminating it by clarifying whether there will be future contact. When appropriate, the worker should state that the investigation may continue and that other sources of information may be contacted. The individual should also be told whether and when he or she will be notified about the worker's findings. The worker should leave the office telephone number, but inform the interviewee that the worker is not always available. When a worker has concerns about future abuse or neglect and the child remains in the home, the worker should tell the child how to contact the worker and give the child the office telephone number. The child should understand that the worker is not always available. The worker may inform the caretaker that the child has been given the worker's phone number.

Before closing the interview, the worker should express appreciation for the interviewee's participation and continued cooperation.

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